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Progressions in the Book of Daniel

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Biblical scholars have noted some progressions characteristics of the book of Daniel. Some of the examples are: “chronological progression” in chapters 1-6 and chapters 7-12,¹ “progression in symbolism” in Dan 8,² and “broken numerical sequence (or progression) in Dan 7:25.”³

The examples mentioned above suggest that there is an apparent literary technique which could be called “progression” in the book of Daniel.⁴ This stylistic device has been appealingly demonstrated by a

¹ John J. Collins, *Daniel with Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature* (Forms of the Old Testament Literature, vol. 20; ed. Rolf Knierim and Gene Tucker; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 32. Although there is such progression “in both tales and visions,” he emphasized that “the relation between the units is not simply sequential.” Ibid.

² William H. Shea, “Spatial Dimensions in the Vision of Daniel 8,” in *Symposium on Daniel: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 525-526. He stressed that there was not only progression of the “greater importance of the successive actors” in that chapter such as from Persian ram to the Greek goat, to the greater and stronger little horn but also the “progression from the comparative to the superlative” of the language used (i.e., the verb *gādal*, “to become great”) in the vision of chap. 8. Ibid.

³ Zdravko Stefanovic, “The Presence of the *Three and a Fraction*: A Literary Figure in the Book of Daniel,” in *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea*, ed. David Merling (Berrien Springs, MI: Institute of Archaeology, Siegfried H. Horn Archaeological Museum, Andrews University, 1997), 201. Stefanovic observes, “[T]he career of the horn is expressed by the progressive order of one, two, and a natural continuation to reach the climax would normally be *three times*. Yet, just before the progression reaches its zenith in number three, the power of the horn is broken into *plg* ‘a division’ or ‘a fraction’ (understood as a half) of the time unit.” Ibid. Italics his.

⁴ Some authors recognized this progression device in some other books of the Bible, for example, Anthony R. Ceresko, *Job 29-31 in the Light of Northwest Semitic: A Translation and Philological Commentary*, Biblica et Orientalia 36 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), 205, where he recognized “linear progression” in Job 29-31. Dov Peretz

pioneering study of Yairah Amit.⁵ She is the one who proposed the name “progression” and defines it as “gradualist technique”⁶ in a given text “wherein the elements are arranged in an ascending or descending order: from general to the particular, or vice versa; from minor to major, or the reverse; from the expected to the unexpected; the impersonal to the personal, and so on.”⁷ She observes that this literary phenomenon, although mentioned in some studies, yet is either “taken for granted” or not being “discussed any further.”⁸ Thus, she declares, “we should include progression in the repertoire of the stylistic devices that served the authors of biblical literature.”⁹ However, the study of progressions had not been thoroughly pursued yet in the book of Daniel.¹⁰ There are sparse descriptions of progression as mentioned above but no intensive inquiry of progression has been made yet on the entire book of Daniel.

Thus, the present article further pursues this element of progression in the book of Daniel. Different types of progression that are found in the

Elkins, *The Bible's Top Fifty Ideas: The Essential Concepts Everyone Should Know* (New York: Specialist Press International, 2005), 109, notes, “The Talmud explains that even in the case of other laws, when there was a progression of teaching by God, first to Moses, then to the priests, and afterward to the whole people, this particular supreme command of holiness is taught to the whole people, telescoping the normal sequence into one step so that everyone would hear it simultaneously.” U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part II from Noah to Abraham Genesis VI 9–XI 32* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1964), 311, notes that in the Gen 12:1, progression is evident, *from your country and your kindred and your father's house*. Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables of Luke* (Combined edition, two volumes in one; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 23, noted the “progression” in Luke 9:57-62.

⁵ Yairah Amit, “Progression as Rhetorical Device in Biblical Literature,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28/1 (2003):3-32

⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁷ Ibid., 9. Similarly, progression can be compared to the plot of a biblical narrative which describes the progressive movement of one action to another in a certain story. See, Leland Ryken, *The Literature of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 27, who observes that “plot must have progression as well as conflict. One element of progression in the biblical story is the unfolding of God's purposes throughout history.”

⁸ Amit, 4.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Alison Lo, “Device of Progression in the Prologue of Job,” *Biblische Notizen* 130 (2006):31-43, inspired by Amit's study on progression demonstrates the same rhetorical technique in the introductory parts of the book of Job.

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book of Daniel will also be clarified and illustrated in this study. After demonstrating the appearances of this certain literary contrivance in each chapter of the book of Daniel, its role for each chapter has also been described. General implications of this progression to the book of Daniel are given at the conclusion of this study.

Narrative Section of Daniel

Dan 1

In this chapter we can see the progression of Daniel's position from being a captive, to being a student, and to being a royal officer. Together with other Hebrew young men, Daniel was chosen among those captives (1:6) to be trained in the royal capacity. We see, at the end of their training, Daniel's position together with the three Hebrew young men, was elevated in the sense that the king had found out that they were ten times better than all his wise men in the kingdom (1:20).

Moreover, the mention of the three names of kings, such as Jehoiakim and Nebuchadnezzar at the beginning of the chapter, and the name of Cyrus at the end of the chapter indicates a progressive movement of the period from which Daniel lived. Daniel lived through the time of Jehoiakim, of Nebuchadnezzar up to the time of Cyrus—from the kingdom of Judah to the Babylonian and the Persian kingdom.

Both progressions described above move toward a certain direction—a definitive end. The end of the captivity and the Babylonian kingdom are the directions of those progressions. The defeat of the Babylonians in their own ground when the captives were found ten times wiser than their Babylonian peers is being highlighted (Dan 1:20).¹¹ Similarly, it stresses the fall of Babylon when Daniel “remained there until the first year of king Cyrus” (Dan 1:21).¹² Daniel “lived to see the fall of Babylon.”¹³ This sets the book of Daniel into a progressive movement of one kingdom to another

¹¹ Zdravko Stefanovic, *Daniel: Wisdom to the Wise: Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2007), 73.

¹² All scriptural references cited here are from the New International Version, unless otherwise stated.

¹³ Robert A. Anderson, *Signs and Wonders: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (International Theological Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 8.

that will positively affect the unfortunate condition of the exiles in Babylon.

Dan 2

At the outset of this chapter, we can see that Nebuchadnezzar was worried because of the troubling content of the dreams. To know the real import of the dream he called all his wise men not only to interpret the dream but to divulge the dream itself.¹⁴ In the process of the negotiations between the wise men and the king, one can see the progression of Nebuchadnezzar's command. We can schematically diagram the progression of the command of the king in this way:

- (A) I want to know the dream (v. 3)
- (B) Tell me the dream and interpret it for me (v. 6)
- (C) Tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me (v. 9)

One can note that the demand to tell the dream progresses based on this diagram. This progression of the demand was intensified when the king finally pronounced a death decree. The delay of the wise men, through repeated appeals, hastened and intensified the pronouncement of the death sentence. Such a harsh decree may seem reasonable from the standpoint of the king, for he thought that the wise men "have conspired to tell" him "misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change" (2:9). Not only did the king accuse his wise men of conspiracy but also accuse them of making delaying tactics.¹⁵

The progression of the command of Nebuchadnezzar ends in the pronouncement of judgment, that is, a death decree. All the wise men were commanded to be summarily executed (Dan 2:12, 13).

Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream, which shows the sequence of the different metal kingdoms and the symbolism used to portray such succession, is noteworthy. One can see the progression or increase of strength of the elements mentioned in the text—from gold to iron. Although one can view these elements as indication of the deterioration of

¹⁴ To know whether Nebuchadnezzar forgot his dream or not based on the contextual and linguistic study, see, Ferdinand O. Regalado, "The Meaning of נִשְׁכַּח in Daniel 2:5, 8 and Its Implications for Nebuchadnezzar's Dream," *DavarLogos* 4/1 (2005): 17-37.

¹⁵ Gleason L. Archer, Jr., "Daniel," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 7:41.

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one world kingdom to another (from more precious to the less precious metals), yet one can also view them in another perspective. This could be seen as a progression of the strength of the different metals involved, from a very fragile metal of gold to the harder metal of iron.¹⁶ This is indicated by the Aramaic word, ܕܢܝܚܐ (“strong,” 2:40) attributed to the iron kingdom. However, both perspectives can be acceptable for both views express movement or flow which is also one of the features of progression. As Shea puts it: “the metals of the image in [Daniel] chapter 2 are listed in order of descending value but increasing strength. Thus the gold of the head represents the wealth of the first kingdom while the iron of the legs represents the might and power of the fourth kingdom.”¹⁷

Dan 3

There are a number of conceptual progressions in this chapter. Firstly, the progression of the way the furnace was heated. Accordingly, it has been ordered to heat it “seven times hotter than usual” (3:19). Secondly, there is also a progression of the number of persons inside the burning furnace—from three individuals to four individuals. Thirdly, there is a progression of the decree of King Nebuchadnezzar; from the decree to worship the golden image he set up in one locality in Babylon to the decree to worship the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego throughout the province of Babylon. Fourthly, there is a progression of the status of the three Hebrews. Earlier in their lives, the three worthy Hebrews “were in the province of Babylon, now they prosper in the province of Babylon.”¹⁸ These Hebrew young men “come out of the ordeal enriched.”¹⁹ Indeed, these three Hebrews moved from one situation in life to another, that is, from being thrown (v. 20) into the blazing furnace to being promoted (v.

¹⁶ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 21 (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1978), 93, notes that “the firmness of this kingdom, represented by the iron, is emphasized, suggesting an enforced policy.”

¹⁷ William H. Shea, “The Unity of Daniel,” in *Symposium on Daniel: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, 1986), 174.

¹⁸ Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel: Wisdom and Dream of a Jewish Prince in Exile* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 57. Italics his.

¹⁹ Ibid.

30) in the province of Babylon. The movement is very clear—from the descending to the ascending status in life. Such kind of progression ends this chapter in a positive tone.

Dan 4

In this chapter, a progression could be seen in the continuous growth of the tree that Nebuchadnezzar had dreamt about. In the dream, the tree kept on growing and became stronger. This is indicated by the words used, such as “to grow great and strong” (רָבָה וַתִּקַּף). According to the text, the tree “grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth” (4:11). But as it is logically expected to grow more, then suddenly a watcher, a holy one from heaven (v.13) is commanded to cut it down. Here is an example which could be reasonably called “a broken progression.” The broken progression delineated in this chapter implies the concept of judgment. But the judgment is not a total judgment. The “stump and its roots” (4:15) have to remain in the ground. There is an element of hope at the end of such progression. In any case, the movement of the broken progression is directed toward the theme of judgment. Such judgment flows out from heaven.

Dan 5

At the beginning of the narrative of this chapter, one can see the progression of Belshazzar’s act that lead to the verdict of his doom. He was not merely satisfied in drinking wine in the banquet but “went beyond”²⁰ it by using the sacred vessels looted from the temple in Jerusalem “as receptacles from which to drink alcohol.”²¹ By doing that particular blasphemous act, Belshazzar brought himself to his own downfall. The progression of his downfall is fittingly summarized by the inscriptions written on the wall, מִנָּה מִנָּה תִּקֵּל וּפְרָסִין. The idea of progression depicted here may not be in the ascending but in the descending order. Accordingly, “the four words can be read as names of weights listed in a descending order.”²² The equivalent measures of weight

²⁰ William H. Shea, *Daniel 1-7: Prophecy as History*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1996), 85.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Stefanovic, “The Presence of the *Three and a Fraction*,” 200. See also Baldwin, 123-24.

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is this: “mina, shekel, half (as it might be ‘ton, hundredweight, quarter’).”²³ In any case, the fact that there is a movement or flow, which can be characterized as progression, attest to an idea that there is indeed a literary progression in this chapter. The movement of the progression of the narrative ends at God’s judgment, which results to the end of the Babylonian kingdom.

Dan 6

In this chapter, one can see the progression of King Darius’ two decrees. The progression can be seen in terms of the nature of the decree—from his initial decree to pray (בעא) solely to him alone for thirty days to his second edict “to fear and tremble” (וְאֵיךְ וְדָרְסוּ) before the living God of Daniel.²⁴ Another progressive movement in the decree is also apparent in terms of the object of worship. The object of worship and reverence in the first decree was Darius, while in the second it was God. The level of progression is clear: from human as the object of worship to God. Again, it is noticeable that the direction of the progression in this chapter is toward God.

Prophetic Section of Daniel

Dan 7

One can notice that there is a progression of the different beasts in the vision in Daniel 7. The progression is in the alternating sequence. There appears to be an ABB¹A¹ pattern of these different beasts in terms of their characteristics and descriptions. The first beast is parallel to the third beast, while the second beast is parallel to the fourth beast. The ABB¹A¹ pattern can be diagramed in this way:

A Beast like a lion (7:4)	A¹ Beast like leopard (7:6)
1. with eagle’s wings (presumably two)	1. with four wings of a bird
2. wings were torn off	2. torn off wings not mentioned
3. no heads mentioned	3. four heads

²³ Baldwin, 124.

²⁴ The last command is for “all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language who were living in all the land” (Dan 6:25, NASB).

B Beast like bear (7:5)

1. it has teeth
2. no horns mentioned
3. no claws mentioned

B¹ The fourth beast (7:7)

1. iron teeth
2. it has ten horns
3. bronze claws (7:17)

From the outline above, one can observe the progression of elements from the lionlike beast in **A** to the leopardlike beast in **A¹**. From presumably two wings of the lionlike beast to four wings of the leopardlike beast; from no head mentioned on the lionlike beast to four heads on the leopardlike beast. A similar progression can be found in the elements and characteristics from the bearlike beast in **B** to the fourth beast in **B¹**. The bearlike beast is mentioned to have teeth without description, while the fourth beast has iron teeth. The bearlike beast is not mentioned with horns, while the fourth beast is mentioned with ten horns. The bearlike beast has no claws, while the fourth beast has bronze claws. These are examples of progression of elements among the four beasts mentioned in this chapter.

The language used to describe the fourth as “terrifying and frightening and very powerful” (Dan 7:7) suggests a progression of strength from the other beasts. The Aramaic word ܦܪܝܢܐ (“strong”) attributed to the fourth beast, which is also used in Dan 2:40, suggests such progression.

In addition to the above progression, the manner in which the little horn is portrayed in the text appears to be in progression: from being small to becoming great. Accordingly, the little horn “was larger in appearance than its associates” (Dan 7:20, NASB). The little horn’s characteristics of speaking boastfully against the Most High, oppressing the saints, and changing the set times and laws (Dan 7:25), indicate that there is indeed a progression of this little horn both in vertical and horizontal level. There appears to be progression also concerning the time period the little horn was given to wear out the saints of the Most High: He progressed for “time, times, and half a time” (Dan 7:25). In this time period of “expected progression, one, two, three is cut off arbitrarily but decisively.”²⁵ In the time the expected progression is cut off, the kingdom was given to the people of the saints of the Most High. This kingdom will not just reign for a certain period of time but will last forever.

²⁵ Baldwin, 146.

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Dan 8

The strength progression of the different beasts in Daniel 7 is also found in this chapter. The strength of the ram was surpassed by the strength of the male goat in that the male goat defeated and struck down the ram. The progression of the strength of male goat is confirmed by its description as the one who “became very great” (הַגָּדֹל עַד-מְאֹד, Dan 8:8). However, the progression continues. After the reign of the male goat there comes a little horn “which started small but grew in power” (Dan 8:8) and also “became very great” (Dan 8:9), even to the point of reaching the host of heavens and “threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them” (Dan 8:10). But at the height of his greatness and progress, the little horn “will be destroyed, but not by human power” (Dan 8:25). The progression of the little horn was broken, and thus can be called “broken conceptual progression.” Indeed, progression of terms and concepts in this chapter are very apparent.

Dan 9

There is a numerical progression that can be found in this chapter. The numbers mentioned of the prophecy progress from 70 weeks (9:24) to 62 weeks (9:25). Then the next number is one week (9:27). And then the number was broken in the sense that the number in the middle of the week is split up, that is, the half of the one week (9:27). The numerical progression that can be found in this chapter are the numbers 70, 62, one week, and half of the week. Also there is a decrease progression of the two numbers of 70. In this chapter, 70 years of exile (as prophesied by prophet Jeremiah) is introduced first. Then 70 weeks prophecy is mentioned next. So there is a descending numerical progression from 70 years to 70 weeks.

However, prophetically speaking, the progression is actually not in the descending type of progressions but an ascending type of progression. “The seventy years usher in a period of time that will consist of seventy weeks of years, or 490 years. The period of ten sabbatical cycles is enlarged here to ten jubilee cycles.”²⁶ “Gabriel’s words point to a new period decreed by God that would be much longer than the seventy years of the exile.”²⁷

²⁶ Stefanovic, *Daniel: Wisdom to the Wise*, 359.

²⁷ Ibid.

It has been observed also that there is a literary progression here in the way God will forgive the sins of his people during this seventy prophetic years (9:24). “The transgressions will come to a stop, be ‘sealed,’ and completely forgiven” (9:24) were considered as “three statements that comprise a literary progression.”²⁸

One can also observe a conceptual progression in this chapter—starting from the idea of the desolation of Jerusalem (9:2) to the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem (9:25). In other words, the conceptual flow of this chapter is from the prophecy of the desolation to the prophecy of the restoration of the city of Jerusalem—from Jeremiah’s prophecy of desolation to Gabriel’s revelation of restoration.

Dan 10

One can observe the progression of the mention of princes in this chapter. It started from the prince of Persia (10:13, 20) to the prince of Greece who will come afterward (10:20). In addition to these earthly princes, a prince named Michael (Dan 10:12, 13) is also mentioned. Michael is described as “your prince” (Dan 10:21), which appears to be “the prince of Israel.”²⁹ Thus, three princes introduced in this chapter: Prince of Persia, Prince of Greece, and Michael the Prince. The mentioned of these three different princes ends to the higher and much better prince—the prince of princes. The progression is moving toward God in the sense that Michael the prince belongs to the realm of God and not to the earthly realm.

Dan 11

In this chapter, there is a progression of one king to another king (11:2-4). The conceptual progression of different kings is accentuated by its linguistic hints. Three kings from Persia will appear (11:2) but the fourth one will be wealthier than the others (יְעֲשִׂיר עֲשָׂר־גְּדוֹל מְכַל, 11:2). Then the scene does not end with the fourth king but continues to another king which is, at this time, described as a “mighty

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ John J. Collins, *Daniel, First Maccabees, Second Maccabees with an Excursus on the Apocalyptic Genre* (Old Testament Message: A Biblical-Theological Commentary; vol. 16; edited by Carroll Stuhlmueller and Martin McNamara; Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1981), 100. See also, Stefanovic, *Daniel: Wisdom to the Wise*, 391.

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king” (מֶלֶךְ גָּבוֹר, 11:3). The progression is apparent, it goes from three kings, to a richer king, and finally to the mighty king. However, the progression is broken when the empire of the mighty king is broken and divided toward the four winds of heaven, that is, toward the four directions of the compass.

A broken numerical progression could also be seen in the first four verses in the chapter. The first three kings of Persia is mentioned, followed by the fourth one who is richer, then followed by the fifth mighty king from Greece. At the height of the powerful kingdom of the fifth king, one can expect the continuation of progression. But the progression is broken when the next king after the fifth one was broken and split into four parts.

Dan 12

There are three verbs in the first four verses of this chapter which show verbal progression. These are the verbs arise, deliver, sleep, awake, shine, and go. Michael will arise (12:1) at the time of conflict described in Dan 11 which will cause deliverance to those people whose names are written in the book, then the multitudes will sleep and will awake (12:2), and finally many will go to increase knowledge (12:4). However, it appears persuasively that three main verbs are dominant in these first four verses; they are: arise, rest, and go. So the verbal progression of arising, resting, and going is based on these three dominant verbs. This kind of progression is being reversed in the last verse of Dan 12. Daniel was told by the angel to go, and then will rest, and will rise in the end (12:13).

Numerical progression in this chapter is also found: from time, times and half a time, which is equivalent to 1,260 prophetic days (12:7), to 1,290 days (12:11), up to 1,335 days (12:12). It is apparent that there is an increase of numbers mentioned in those verses. The numerical progression continues upward. It was neither broken nor divided. Thus, it seems that chapter 12 of Daniel ends in a positive progression.

Conclusion

Different types of progression found in the selected chapters in the book of Daniel are conceptual, numerical, verbal, and literary. The narrative of chapters 1-6 shared a similar apocalyptic worldview with the prophetic parts in the sense that both sections shared the same end of the progressions. The progressions either end in a theme of judgment or more

toward God or to the realm of God.³⁰ Could we safely say then that the narrative part of Daniel mirrors the apocalyptic ends of the prophetic part? Our study also betrays the eschatological emphasis of the book of Daniel.³¹ This eschatological emphasis is seen in the development of the different earthly kingdoms climaxing to the kingdom of God. Such characteristic of Daniel points to one of its descriptions as the book of the “end.”³² In other words, the progression found in the book starts from the period of the writer to the end of the world.

Likewise, the progressions found in our study lend further support to the literary beauty of the book of Daniel. If an attentive reader could see the pattern of progressions in this book, then, he or she can only appreciate its literary beauty and its message, as well. The message is clear that progress in the biblical perspective is not the progress toward the zenith of success of world kingdoms but progress that ends in the kingdom of God.³³ A utopian world envisioned by humans is not the climax of the progress of this world from the perspective of God; it is the ushering in of the kingdom of God here on earth.

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³⁰ It has been noted that “the historical section of the book of Daniel is one which is a step-by-step progression [that] continually vindicates Yahweh.” Zdravko Stefanovic, “Daniel: A Book of Significant Reversals,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 30 (1992):146.

³¹ See for example, among others, John J. Collins, “Genre, Ideology and Social Movement in Jewish Apocalypticism,” in *Mysteries and Revelation*, eds. John J. Collins and J. H. Charlesworth, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 9 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991); idem, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1-42, 85-115.

³² See Gerhard Pfandl, *The Time of the End in the Book of Daniel*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series, vol. 1 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992); idem, “Daniel’s ‘Time of the End’,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 7/1 (1996): 141-158.

³³ The purpose of this progression is, probably, to heighten the emphasis on the ushering in of the kingdom of God in the final period of world history as depicted in the book of Daniel at the same time to reveal “God’s purposes throughout history” (Ryken, 27) in the book.